

UNCLAS BRATISLAVA 000302

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PGOV LO IZ

SUBJECT: IRAQI CIVIL SERVANTS AND NGO REPS TRAIN IN SLOVAKIA

REF: 04 Bratislava 991

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶11. (U) Through a grant from the International Republican Institute (IRI), the Pontis Foundation brought nine Iraqi civil servants and NGO leaders to Slovakia for three weeks in March. This was the second group of four planned. It consisted of one IRI-Baghdad employee, two NGO, four Ministry of Education, and two MFA representatives. This is part of an on-going IRI/Pontis-sponsored program to expose Iraqi civil servants and NGO representatives the experience of a country that recently navigated a democratic transition (reftel).

¶12. (U) The MFA and Ministry of Education (MOE) will sign an agreement on future cooperation with Iraqi ministries to share the transition experience. Pontis will bring the third group of Iraqis to Slovakia April 21. The group will consist of one IRI-Baghdad employee, three politicians, three Iraqi MFA officials, and three NGO representatives. By the end of the four sponsored visits, Pontis will have brought 32 Iraqi civil servants and NGO representatives to Slovakia for training.

¶13. (U) Five members of the delegation described their experiences positively at the March 23 IRI/Pontis "Young Iraqi Leaders in Slovakia" forum. Iraqi participants included Hisham A. Mohammed and Allaa M.O. Al-Shamari from the Iraqi MFA, Seba K. Abbas Kamas from the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education, Salim Kh. Saad from the NGO Students Against War, and Dr. Yasser Hussain from the NGO Iraqi Doctors. Participants spent one week each at the Slovak MFA, Slovak MOE, and various NGOs. All participants appreciated the IRI/Pontis program, saying it was a useful and practical experience.

¶14. (U) Mohammed made a short introductory presentation at the Forum where he described optimistically the next steps in Iraq, including the new constitution and next elections. Participants discussed the practical application of the constitution and potential changes to the current proportional electoral system to a majoritarian system. They confidently argued that Iraq has a five-thousand year tradition, so Iraqi experts and lawyers could easily draft a constitution. They reacted strongly against an assertion by an audience member that Paul Bremmer prepared the current election law, emphasizing the role of the Iraqi Supreme Election Commission. They recognized the current law might be improved but was adequate for now.

¶15. (SBU) Salim Saad told emboff privately that it is much more useful to come to a country like Slovakia, which is small and recently went through a democratic transition, than to go to a big city like London where the legal system has been in place for a long time. Each of the Iraqi participants said that learning about the Slovak experience with NGOs was the most useful part of the training. They noted the role of NGOs is new to them and were impressed by how NGOs serve as mediators between the people and the government. The discussion about the watchdog role of NGOs seemed to be especially valuable. Salim said the U.S. is providing most of the funding to Iraqi NGOs; only relatively small contributions come from Europe. He noted the need for more donors. Hussain presented his NGO, Iraqi Doctors, noting the organization originally focused on health care but switched to democracy building before the elections.

¶16. (SBU) COMMENT. The group was energetic, capable, and idealistic. The discussion was optimistic and forward-looking. Participants seemed determined to make their country a democratic success and benefited greatly from the program in Slovakia. The 27-year old Hussain particularly impressed emboffs and the Pontis organizers as a future leader with his frank and energetic, can-do approach. END COMMENT. MINIMIZE CONSIDERED

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